



## The Structure of Bazin's Thought

Brian Henderson

*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 4. (Summer, 1972), pp. 18-27.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0015-1386%28197222%2925%3A4%3C18%3ATSOBT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-8>

*Film Quarterly* is currently published by University of California Press.

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucal.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

authoritarian regime, and if Bertolucci does not have as much freedom as he would like to say things more directly in his films, he does manage to hint at them broadly in his oblique and metaphorical style. And I'm not so sure that the charm of the film, which lies in its ambiguity and playfulness, would have been kept with a more straightforward style in which Bertolucci's themes were delivered as a clear, political message. Anyway, if Bertolucci had that much freedom in a mass medium like TV, there would have been no need for this film.

The style of *The Spider's Strategem*, as in *Mistreatment*, counterpoints the content. In a flamboyant, sensual, and theatrical style, Bertolucci is critical of the politics of flamboyance, and of the absorption in sensuality of those who did not oppose it. Though the film is richer by this contradiction, it would have been richer still if Bertolucci had allowed his romantic hero to have been more compelling. At least

in *Before the Revolution*, Bertolucci endowed his anti-hero with a lyricism that made him sympathetic. Some Marxist critics denounced the film because its lyricism is a lament close to self-pity. But it is a self-pity in the wider sense: a self-pity which moves from one's own suffering to the suffering of others. This empathetic "sentimental" sense of the dignity of other individuals, despite their shortcomings, even their illusions, characterizes some of the best Italian films since World War II: *La Terra Trema*, *Umberto D*, *I Vitelloni*, *Nights of Cabiria*. The greatest art may defeat our attempts to use it as magic, it may make us see how enslaved we are by shadows, but it also renews our sense of how compelling shadows are. For the power of art lies, not only beyond that of any simple message, but beyond that of truth; like religion but without a theology, it makes us acknowledge in wonder and in awe all that can not be comprehended.

BRIAN HENDERSON

## The Structure of Bazin's Thought

Even before his death, André Bazin's disciples and opponents were "going beyond" him—absorbing what they considered new and important in his work, discarding the rest. Especially since the appearance of *What Is Cinema?* in English in 1967, this process has gone on extensively in England and America also. The project is a healthy and necessary one for film thought, but in the hurry to go beyond Bazin it has not been clearly established who Bazin was. If that which is gone beyond is not fully known, then neither is any subsequent posi-

tion. We must know who Bazin was to know who we are.

What is needed is a theory of Bazin, which in turn requires a history of film thought in which to place Bazin; that is, a theory of film theory. In "Two Types of Film Theory," [FQ, Spring 1971] I tentatively formulated an analytical theory of film theory. What is needed also is an historical theory of film theory, one which would include the analytical moment. Toward this goal, the present essay addresses the structure of Bazin's thought; a later essay

will address the place of that structure in the history of film thought, attempting to relate inner dialectic to outer dialectic. An analytic moment will be followed by a synthetic moment.

It is surprising that no one in Bazin's country of origin has studied the structure of his thought, for it is complex and interesting, with its own problems and laws. Perhaps the fact that Bazin was so clearly "wrong" in his formulation of many questions and answers prevented serious structural study. Paradoxically it is dialectical thought (notoriously interested in wrong positions) which insists on studying the structure of Bazin's thought, by making that thought as a whole central to its inquiry. Not the least importance of dialectics is its effective deployment of analytic thought; because only dialectics can say what it is important to study and why. Analytic thought has no internal standards of relevance; accounts of its successes invariably bring in hunches and instinct to explain its application here rather than there. But the dialectical reconstruction of a whole, determined by dialectics to be worth study, is itself dependent upon an initial analysis of that whole and its parts; and can only be as true, as precise, and as comprehensive as the analysis on which it builds.

For English readers, the structure of Bazin's thought is reflected in the principal source of Bazin texts available to them. Hugh Gray's translated volumes of 1967 and 1971 collect the principal theoretical pieces and many of the most important critical-historical pieces, respectively. (In addition to Gray's volumes there are now a number of other Bazin essays or excerpts available in English.\*) The historical Bazin has not existed in English until the appearance of *What Is Cinema?*, Volume II, last year. Its immediate effect is to call seriously into question the widely held belief that Bazin's thought is a unified exploration "based on one central idea, an affirmation of the objectivity of the cinema," in Eric Rohmer's phrase. Upon closer examination, Bazin's ontological work and his historical work appear virtually as separate and opposed systems op-

erating within the same body of thought. Since this division is central to the structure of Bazin's thought, it must be established in detail.

Bazin's writings on reality theory, what could be called his ontology system, consist of: "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" (1945),

---

\*Other Bazin writings available in English include the following: "La Politique des Auteurs" [1957], in *The New Wave*, edited by Peter Graham (New York: Doubleday, 1968), also in *Cahiers du Cinéma in English*, No. 1 (1966); "Hitchcock versus Hitchcock" [1954], in *Cahiers du Cinéma in English*, No. 2 (1966), reprinted in *Focus On Hitchcock*, edited by Albert J. LaValley (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972). Several brief Bazin pieces appear in the Seghers volumes on Cocteau, Welles, Renoir, and Fellini: "Les Parents Terribles" [1948] in *Jean Cocteau* by René Gilson (New York: Crown, 1969); two brief pieces [1948] in *Orson Welles* by Maurice Bessy (New York: Crown, 1971); two extracts from a 1952 *Cahiers du Cinéma* article on Renoir in *Jean Renoir* by Pierre Leprohon (New York: Crown, 1971); *Federico Fellini* by Gilbert Salachas (New York: Crown, 1968) contains three extracts from "Cabiria: Voyage to the End of Neorealism" [1957], which appears in its entirety in *What Is Cinema?*, Volume II (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1971). Substantial extracts from "Le Jour se lève . . . Poetic Realism" [1953] appear in *Le Jour se lève* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970). *The New Wave* also contains Peter Graham's translation of "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" [1952; 1955; 1950], which contains five pages (Pp. 40-45) on William Wyler not contained in Hugh Gray's translation, *What Is Cinema?*, Volume I (Berkeley, California, 1967); it appears that Graham has interpolated an article on Wyler [1948] into the text of "Evolution." A two-page excerpt from Bazin's *Orson Welles* (Paris: Chavane, 1950) appears in *Focus on Citizen Kane*, edited by Ronald Gottesman (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

---

## BAZIN VOL. II

Westerns, Chaplin, eroticism, neorealism  
University of California Press  
Berkeley 94720  
\$6.95

---

"The Myth of Total Cinema" (1946), "Theater and Cinema" (1951), "Cinema and Exploration" (1953; 1956), and "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage" (1953; 1957). These essays concern the relations between cinema and reality, that is, between the camera and its objects. Their treatment of the problems concerned and of the films used as examples or as subjects of critical analysis is ahistorical. For Bazin's purposes in these pieces, it does not matter when these films were made, what their connections with current film styles are, nor even who made them. The later essays on this subject connect directly to the "Ontology" essay and its concerns, without any film-historical or individual-stylistic mediation whatever; they occur in the timeless realm of pure aesthetic theory.

Bazin's critical-historical writings, what could be called his history system or simply his history, divide into two continuous groups. There is "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" (1952; 1955; 1950), Bazin's survey of the development of cinematic form, 1920-1945; and there are Bazin's essays on the cinema of his own period, centering on his neorealism essays, 1948-1957. Most of Bazin's other critical work takes its place within and fills out this two-part historical scheme. Thus his books on Renoir and Welles belong (in the main) to the 1920-1948 period and fill out his treatment of these two figures in "Evolution." This is true also of his piece on *Le Jour se lève*, his piece on Jean Gabin, his journal articles on Renoir, Welles, etc. Many other pieces fill out the 1945-1957 period: the essays on Bresson, Cocteau, Hitchcock, etc. Some of Bazin's other work, particularly the sociological essays and occasional discussions of genre, bear a tangential relation to the more stylistically-concerned historical work. Thus his two essays on the Western lie outside of his central historical concerns but are themselves historical in form and treatment. "In Defense of Mixed Cinema" (approx. 1952), concerned with the wave of literary adaptations which appeared from 1940 to 1951, occupies an odd place of its own. The four essays on Chaplin would seem to belong

to the historical work but in fact they are largely ahistorical, that is, removed from Bazin's usual concerns with historical period and style. (The reason is that Bazin treats Chaplin as his own history: *Monsieur Verdoux* and *Limelight* refer back to Chaplin's early films, which Bazin sees as the world-wide myth of cinema itself. No other historical relation is necessary.)

Several things should be noted about Bazin's historical work. First, its two historical periods form a single, continuous history. "Evolution" ends, perhaps self-consciously, with mention of the neorealist films: one of the principal functions of the essay is to serve as formal and historical preface to the neorealist period and to the films of Bazin's time generally. Contrariwise, neorealism is the continuation and fulfillment of the formal movements which Bazin traces in "Evolution." Second, the continuity between these two areas of Bazin's work is methodological as well as historical. The same critical concerns and historical/developmental concerns are found in both. Thus "Evolution" is critical history and the neorealist essays are thoroughly historical criticism. "Evolution" does not collect titles, dates, and disembodied styles as most work that goes by the name of film history does; it is a conceptually coherent, developmental analysis of the films, styles, and movements covered. Its texture is thereby continuous with the neorealist pieces and with Bazin's other critical work. If "Evolution" is critical in this sense, it is also true that the neorealist pieces are historical: written year by year as the films appeared, these essays constitute a history of the aesthetic peaks of that movement better than any that has since appeared. Bazin accomplished this unparalleled feat by relating the work of each director to his earlier work, and by comparing the style of each to those of other artists—all within the framework of the neorealist movement, itself in process of unfolding but clearly set off from other historical periods and styles. The resulting network of relations is a comprehensive analysis/synthesis of the most important neorealist work and remains a model of criticism.

Thus Bazin's critical-historical work constitutes a single history of cinema, 1920-1957. Of course there are many gaps and a great unevenness in density; much of this history is no more than an outline. The important point is that Bazin makes clear what he believes are the principal movements, historical tendencies, and achievements of this period.

The opposition between ontology system and history system, and more generally between ontological thought and historical thought, is the central feature of Bazin's work. Neither of these systems can be reduced to the other nor the gap between them bridged in any satisfactory way. Similarly, in our analysis there is no way to proceed logically from one to the other; we must constitute and examine each separately and then the opposition and other relations between them. As we do so we will look for links between them but this cannot be done in advance. At the phenomenal or given level, these systems are utterly opposed. If they can be reconciled in any sense, it will only be in and through their contrariety.

The ontology system essays stand together by virtue of common concerns and similar reasoning, not by strict logical connection. The "Ontology" states that photograph and reality, image and object share a common being. It sets forth this relation for all cases; it does not discuss camera style or montage *vs.* long-take treatment. *All* photography bears a certain relation to reality; neither reconstructed expeditions nor Soviet montage nor German Expressionism is excluded. Thus when the ontology criticism judges certain exploration films and fantasy films to be more faithful to reality than others, and therefore aesthetically superior, it does not apply the "Ontology" nor even extend it. These essays must invent ontological principles of criticism since none are given or implied by the "Ontology."

"Cinema and Exploration" and "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage," dealing with expedition films and fantasy films respectively, attempt to develop critical equivalences for the descriptive propositions of the "Ontology." The connective reasoning, implied not given,

seems to be this: in an expedition film or children's adventure, some real event is the object of the image. If the ontological identity of image and object is to be honored (in spirit as in letter), then the image should record the real event (not a reconstruction as in *Scott of the Antarctic*) as far as possible in its spatial-temporal integrity. (The struggle with the alligator on a fishing line in *Louisiana Story* fails on both counts as the "event" is synthesized by montage.) This is, strictly speaking, a reinvention of the "Ontology" principle, but a plausible one.

What are the features of this criticism? It is ahistorical: it does not matter when these films were made nor their relation to movements or styles. The film-maker is in no sense the subject of inquiry; his is merely the name to which credit or blame is ascribed. The sole category of this criticism is relation of camera and event, the sole judgment that of correct or incorrect relation, the sole logic that of non-contradiction. The ontological principle applied by these essays is not a critical tool at all but a narrow canon of validity. Its results are achieved mechanically and tend to be either trivial or tautological. Immediate documents of expeditions are superior to reconstructed



André Bazin ►

ones. Fantasies and adventures should show dangerous or unusual events in a single shot rather than fake them through montage. If the ontology criticism eliminates the director, it eliminates the critic also. One who read only these pieces would not meet the viewer who wrote so well on Rossellini, Bresson, etc. It is a damaging critique of the entire ontology side of Bazin's work that it leads only to this. The ontology criticism is a dead end; if he had only done these pieces, Bazin would have small claim on our attention.

"Evolution" is Bazin's principal historical essay; but it also has an ontological aspect, even a function within the ontology system. We will consider that function here, as an adjunct to our consideration of the ontology system; and the rest of "Evolution," or rather "Evolution" itself again in discussing the history system. (Because "Evolution" performs several different functions, finely interrelated, within Bazin's system, we come upon it at several stages in the unfolding of that system.) One of the tasks of "Evolution" is to develop and apply ontological principles for the judgment of film styles, 1920-1948. The results are familiar: long-take, composition-in-depth style (Welles, Italian neorealism) is the most faithful to reality; American and French "invisible editing" of the thirties next so; Soviet montage faithful in image style, unfaithful in duration and relation of images; German Expressionism completely unfaithful. The critical principles by which Bazin reaches these results—the equivalences he establishes between shooting styles and relation to reality—are not unrelated to those of the ontology criticism. Indeed the latter pieces should be read in conjunction with "Evolution," in which the discussion of reality-stylistic equivalences is fuller. Of course, the "Ontology" is as silent on fiction film styles as it is on documentary styles; here too "Evolution" invents ontological principles, it does not just apply them.

The reality-relation of fiction films might seem to require different analysis than documentary and reality. Bazin seems to draw this distinction when he speaks in "Evolution" of

"the scenario proper" . . . "the ultimate object of the narrative"; but it has no effect on his argument. In "Evolution" as in the ontological criticism, Bazin speaks again and again of "the event" and of the truth or falsity of different camera styles to it. Moreover, the ontological judgments of "Evolution" are hardly less simplistic and broad than those of the ontological criticism. Thus Expressionism and Soviet montage are invalidated (with what final critical consequences is not clear) by a single application of the principle; and Hollywood composition-in-depth and Italian neorealism are validated just as broadly and undifferentiatedly. "Evolution" goes beyond the very limited operation of the ontological criticism, however, because such ontological value-judgment is only one of its functions. (Those functions are so thoroughly mixed that the process of ontological judgment also involves, inextricably, superb description and analysis of styles and movements. In establishing ontological-stylistic equivalence, Bazin orders and expositis film-historical data with great clarity and comprehension; the relation could also be put the other way around. The two processes are mixed but not inseparable: we now read "Evolution" as history and discount its value-judgments, i.e., the rejection or demotion of montage and expressionism.)

The ontology system involves very simplistic judgments and is itself simple in structure. The history system involves far more complex, multifaceted judgments; as a structure of thought it is also far more difficult and complex than the ontology system. The first thing to note about the history system is that it is not derivable from the ontology system. The broad, undifferentiated approvals and disapprovals of "Evolution" are as far as Bazin's ontological thought carries into film history and the critical-historical work. As noted, this is not far at all. These validity-equivalences are not critical principles and cannot serve as the basis for a criticism. It is noteworthy that nearly all of Bazin's criticism takes place within the approved zones of "Evolution": thirties composition-in-depth (Renoir), American composition-in-depth (Welles and Wyler), Italian

neorealism and other postwar cinema. This approval, however, is no more illuminating than the disapproval of montage and expressionism. It provides no basis for evaluation or explication. Bazin's ontological principles could judge this exploration film inferior because it reconstructed historical events; it could judge that neorealist films are in some way better than expressionist ones (though Bazin was very hesitant to apply his ontology principles to specific judgments of worth; he preferred to critique movements generally). It could not elucidate the differences between Rossellini's style and DeSica's nor between early and later Rossellini, nor make evaluations between artists or within the career of one. Bazin might have used relation to reality as a scale of value for individual films: those films coming closest to reality are better or more interesting than others; but he does not do this. He never asks whether Rossellini or Visconti or DeSica is the most realistic; he asks how each approaches reality, sees, understands, shapes it. Putting this question rather than the other shifts emphasis from reality and its valid reproduction to style, temperament, world-view of the individual artist. Thus, the entire realm of Bazin's critical history lies beyond that of the ontology system; though, in systematic terms, it rests upon the conceptual foundation of ontology approval.

If we compare the history criticism with the ontology criticism, we note that the former is historical in several senses. The factor of history is introduced on both sides of the original image-reality model, and transforms it. Both object and image are historicized in the historical work: the films addressed (e.g., Italian neorealism) concern humans in an historical situation rather than in timeless relations with nature, and take their place also in a history of cinema—each film may be placed in a history of styles, of the artist, of movements. One might say that it is the interaction between historical object (human subject) and historical image that now becomes the central question: the historical reality of 1951 is different from that of 1945, the film styles of 1951 are (or

may be) different from those of 1945. (Of course expedition films *can* be viewed historically and fiction films ahistorically; it depends on the interests of the critic.)

Since they are concerned with correspondence between image and reality, the ontology pieces employ a logic of noncontradiction and a vocabulary of like and unlike. The historical pieces employ a development logic and an historical vocabulary. Bazin's piece on *La Terra Trema* embodies this logic and vocabulary unmistakably:

Visconti lets us see that the Italian neorealism of 1946 has been left far behind on more than one score. Hierarchies in art are fairly pointless, but cinema is too young an art still, too involved in its own evolution to be able to indulge in repeating itself for any length of time. Five years in cinema is the equivalent of an entire literary generation. It is the merit of Visconti to have managed a dialectical integration of the achievements of recent Italian film with a larger, richer aesthetic for which the term 'realism' has not too much meaning now. I am not saying that *La Terra Trema* is superior to *Paisà* or to *La Caccia tragica* but only that it does, at least, have the merit of having left them behind from an historical standpoint.

(Volume II, Pp. 44–45.)

This is historical analysis but it is historical evaluation also. Bazin is careful to disown the descriptive bias that makes later works in a tradition richer or better than earlier ones, but he does make historical development itself into a value. *La Terra Trema* is important, and in that sense good, because it constitutes a stylistic development within neorealism and within film history more generally.

As mentioned above, Bazin had to go outside of the ontology system if he was to function as a critic at all; that is, to say more about the films of his period than blanket approval on ontological grounds. The historical work generally, and especially "Evolution" and the neorealist pieces suggest that he may have drawn his concepts and methods partly from art history. The historical criticism is concerned with distinguishing stylistic movements, relating movements and individual artists, making comparisons and distinctions between individ-

ual artists and between the stages of an artist's development—the classical concerns of art history. At times "Evolution" suggests Heinrich Wölfflin, not only in its admirable clarity but in its strong period-style emphasis, approaching at times an "art history without names," and in its underlying suggestion that "not everything is possible at all times." "Evolution" also contains hints of the Hegelian basis of much art history: given that each period of film history explores only one aspect of cinema (or complex of aspects), it follows that cinema itself—the idea of cinema in its fullness—exists only in the aggregate: in the historical totality of cinema. Bazin's entire critical-historical work would be clarified by a thorough-going methodological critique, perhaps along the lines of Arnold Hauser's *The Philosophy of Art History*. It seems likely from its surface that Bazin's historical work falls into many of the pitfalls in reasoning, concept, and method to which much art history has been subject. This is not surprising nor does it diminish Bazin's great value, in that he engaged himself in nothing less than inventing an art history of the cinema.

In structural terms, "Evolution" and "An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism" (1948) concern the characteristics and relations of periods and movements and their styles, while the other critical pieces concern artists and films within those movements. Both levels of criticism show Bazin at his best, which is not to say that all difficulties and tensions created by the two perspectives are resolved. In comparison to the ontology criticism, the historical work defines as large a role for the critic as it does for the director. It does this by its openness to integral artistic creation, which is not to be hampered by a priori critical rules (see "In Defense of Rossellini"—1955); and thereby requiring a comparably large scope in the critical function. Bazin's own work is generally excellent to the degree that his subject is: his Rossellini, Visconti, Welles, Renoir, Bresson pieces are perhaps his best individual criticism.

We have argued that the "Ontology" is not the logical basis for the ontological equivalences developed and applied in the ontology

criticism and "Evolution." Therefore the "Ontology" is not, strictly speaking, the *theory* of the ontological work; let alone the theory of Bazin's work as a whole. It may state a theory of the photographic image, but it is not a theory of or governing the operations which go on in Bazin's ontological (or other) work. As said, "Evolution" and the ontological pieces develop their own theory. If theory consists of the assumptions and methods which guide a certain practice (or the formulation of these), then it must be that the critical-historical work contains an implicit theory of its own. We have discussed some of these methods and assumptions without attempting to formulate them. There exists at least a partial formulation of the methods and assumptions of his critical-historical work in Bazin's own words. These passages have the density and self-containment of theoretical formulations, but they occur in an essay devoted to nontheoretical matters and are certainly not presented by Bazin as a theoretical position.

Let us hope, then, to have as often as possible films like *Le Jour se lève*, *La Règle du jeu*, or *The Best Years of Our Lives*. But these are platonic wishes, attitudes of mind that have no bearing on the actual evolution of the cinema. If the cinema turns more and more to literature—indeed to painting or to drama—it is a fact which we take note of and attempt to understand because it is very likely that we cannot influence it. In such a situation, if fact does not absolutely make right, it requires the critic at least to be favorably predisposed.

If we take another system of reference we must say of the cinema that its existence precedes its essence; even in his most adventurous extrapolations, it is this existence from which the critic must take his point of departure. As in history, and with approximately the same reservations, the verification of a change goes beyond reality and already postulates a value judgment.

Even if this critical pragmatism does not seem to the reader sufficiently well-founded, he must nevertheless admit that it justifies in us a certain humility and thoughtful prudence when faced with any sign of evolution in the cinema. ("In Defense of Mixed Cinema." Volume I, Pp. 71–72)

These passages certainly reflect in part the operative principles of the critical-historical

work; whether they theorize that work fully and adequately is another question. The passages formulate Bazin's "favorable disposition" to the unfolding cinema of his period and also that method of historical evaluation which we noted in the piece on *La Terra Trema*: "the verification of a change goes beyond reality and already postulates a value judgment." Here as in most cases, however, the fact of formulating or explicitizing the theory of a practice goes beyond mere reflection and is itself a qualitative change. Thus Bazin may have been favorably predisposed to the films of his period because he liked realistic style; his formulation *requires* of himself and other critics favorable disposition *in all cases*. In another respect also, the "Mixed Cinema" formulations go beyond the critical-historical work itself: they are entirely free of that ontology standpoint, of the predisposition toward realism in particular, that still colors most of the critical-historical pieces in some degree. Indeed these passages do not permit a position of privilege to any style or movement.

The "Mixed Cinema" formulations clarify and give definition to the entirety of Bazin's historical work. In so doing they sharpen the opposition between the ontology system and the history system. They may or may not affect the ontology criticism, which lies or seeks to lie outside of history; they certainly destroy the ontological equivalences of "Evolution." "Mixed Cinema" requires openness to montage and expressionism and all other styles, regards these changes in film history as valuable, etc. The effect of "Mixed Cinema" on "Evolution" is to destroy its (negative) value-judgments and thereby to recover it as film history. This is how we read "Evolution" in any case—for its admirable analysis/synthesis of film styles, 1920-1948, not for the information that montage and expressionism are bad because they distort the image. Because the structure of the essay is historical, its value judgments are easily separable. Where Bazin puts minus signs before the disapproved styles, we put plus signs; where he ranks in value and eliminates in order to form an ideal history, a history of

realism, we recover all styles mentioned, in equal value, as a dialectical history of the film styles that have been. Bazin's good-bad-good gives way to a dialectical history of the whole. In short we are abreast of "Mixed Cinema," that is, somewhat beyond Bazin's actual historical work. Put another way, "Mixed Cinema" is something like the implicit theory of our own film-viewing and film-critical work.

Now that ontology system and history system stand opposed in theory and practice, we must consider to some degree the relations between them. The ontology pieces are unhistorical and self-contained; the critical-historical work has no impact on them—except that of over-shadowing them in bulk and importance. It is not true, however, that the critical-historical work is free of the ontological strain in Bazin's thought. The nature and extent of this impingement—in the overall and in each essay—is a difficult and complex question. Those who see Bazin's work as the unfolding of a single ontological idea, and therefore as a unity, presumably see the critical-historical work in this light also. It would be illuminating and valuable if someone would study Bazin's work from this point of view, particularly the critical-historical work. Such a study would surely uncover many important relations within Bazin's work, particularly between ontological and historical areas. We will consider certain aspects of this relation, which we do not at all see as overcoming the division we have argued, but cannot hope to do a complete job.

The issue of the ontological impingement on Bazin's critical-historical work centers on certain uses of language in that work; particularly, of course, the use of "realism" and "reality." This is by no means a simple question: for Bazin uses these terms in a number of different senses, sometimes within the same essay. The only adequate and complete way to study this question is to trace the uses and senses of "realism" and "reality" and related terms in each Bazin piece, both in the middle-level, period-movement pieces, "Evolution" and Neorealism" and in the individual criticism. We will have to limit ourselves to some generalizations about

Bazin's uses of these terms.

We recall first that there is no logical connection or carry-over between the "Ontology" and the critical work, ontological or historical. The "Ontology" says that photograph and object share a common being; the ontological criticism and "Evolution" concern the relations of different *styles* of photograph to reality; the historical criticism concerns qualities of and differences between styles within very large groupings of styles considered valid in relation to reality by the ontological function of "Evolution." This is the structure of Bazin's work from the ontology standpoint. As we have seen, this structure has no bearing on the historical criticism itself, except to provide a nonoperative ontological validation. That criticism is structured by an art-historical division of function between period-style analyses and criticism of individual artists and works within those periods. This structure and the concepts, methods, and working theory of this two-levelled criticism derive in no way from the ontological system or line of thought. This context defines and controls the meaning of all terms used within it. Thus when a critical essay uses the term realism, the word refers first of all to the definitions and classifications worked out by "Evolution" and "Neorealism." When one examines those essays one finds the term used to describe certain families of shooting styles (also script styles, acting styles, etc. in the case of "Neorealism"). These definitions do not concern reality or relation to reality, they describe artistic qualities. In the middle-level essays, realism is an art-historical term which is used to describe and classify. "Evolution" also supplies ontological analysis of the styles discussed, but this does not affect the descriptive function. The function of the term "realism" in the historical-critical essays is first of all to place the director or work in relation to a family of styles described by "Evolution" and/or "Neorealism."

The individual essays sometimes use the term "realism" in other ways, also, though almost always *in addition to* the art-historical sense described above. Thus Bazin sometimes

uses the term to describe the *particular* qualities of a director's style; he speaks of Visconti's "aesthetic realism," Fellini's "poetic realism," etc. In this usage it is not the term realism itself, but how Bazin qualifies that term that is the center of the critical act. "Realism" becomes the name of the problem to be solved, a kind of "X." When Bazin has defined the kind of realism a director practices, he has defined his style (and vice versa). In this usage, which pervades the critical pieces, "realism" is Bazin's touchstone or basic critical concept, but it remains in itself a blank or open term. Moreover, the term becomes less distinct as Bazin applies it to more and more directors and uses it in different ways; it becomes diluted. This is true also in "Evolution" in which Bazin collects a large number of diverse styles under the term "realism" (Murnau, Stroheim, Welles, Rossellini). What happens here and in the individual criticism also is that the term fills up with diverse and contradictory contents: it becomes historicized as Bazin uses it to apply to his widening historical interests.

Sometimes Bazin uses "realism" or "reality" in the historical criticism in a sense that seems ontological, as well as descriptive in the ways discussed above. What operational effect this has on the act of criticism, however, is not clear. It may be no more than a kind of flavoring which Bazin uses to retain connection with his ideas concerning reality.

Despite its realist terminology, the history system is not assimilable to the ontology system. The opposition of the two systems remains irreconcilable. Each system, universalized by the theory, presents itself as the entirety of Bazin's work; but each can make itself into the whole only by enforcing certain modifications or mutilations on the other. The history system can take over the whole only by eliminating the ontology system and the ontological dimension of "Evolution," recovering that essay as descriptive history. The ontology system can take over the whole only by dissolving the structure of the critical history and recovering each piece as a serial application or exemplification of the idea

of image-object identity.

It might be asked why this conflict of possible structures, and hence of theories, is important at all. The reality or substance of Bazin's work, its bulk as well as that of greatest importance in it, is the critical-historical work itself. The systematic principles which seek to define this work are metaphysical excrescences in regard to it. They are competing ideologies of the whole which seek to turn it this way or that. The chief effect of "Mixed Cinema" as ideology is to turn the finite, finished, in-itself of the historical work into project: unfinished, forward-turned aspiration toward a comprehensive art-history of the cinema. The ideology of the ontology system turns it into an unstructured series of emanations of a single idea, essentially backward-turned. Arguably the conflict between the two principles has more to do with ourselves, the heirs of this work, than with the work itself. The project of completing an art history of the cinema is one which we take up, or not; Bazin cannot do it. For this reason alone the conflict is important; and also for the related reason that how a body of work understands itself is inextricably part of that work. This self-understanding does not control the understanding or the use of those who use the work; but it must be engaged by them if they are to understand both the work and their own use of it.

We have argued that Bazin's work understands itself in two ways and that these ways are irreconcilable. There is discernible in that work, however, a serious attempt to overcome this conflict; if it is not an intentional "attempt," it is at least a possible ground of its overcoming. Several passages in Bazin have a teleological flavor; "The Myth of Total Cinema" (1946) and "Evolution" are explicitly teleological. "Myth" argues that the idea of a total representation of reality was the inspiration which guided the pioneers of cinematic technology. The essay suggests that this project remains the aspiration of cinema. "Evolution" suggests also that film history exhibits a movement toward greater and greater realism; and supports this theme in several ways. The essay ends on the combined notes of composition-in-depth and

neorealism, which have been presented as highest stages in film history's long progress toward realism, which Bazin explicitly calls its "vocation for realism." "Evolution" implies a technological base for this teleology: it traces the elimination of titles, the development of sound, of deep-focus lenses and panchromatic film stock, and the aesthetic alterations which followed each. Bazin sees each of these developments as an increase in realism.

It is easy to see how this teleology provides a ground for the unification of ontology and history. The ideal of total realism is gradually realized by film history; film history is a long progress toward the realization of its essence. Perfect realism will never be achieved but it will be approximated more and more closely; in any case this progress is the meaning of film history, its unifying pattern and spirit. This teleology or philosophy of film history overcomes the underlying divisions within Bazin's thought—that between ontology and history and, behind these, between value and fact, essence and existence. But this attempt fails on several counts. First of all, while film history to Bazin's day gave his teleological scheme a certain plausibility—neorealism and composition-in-depth *did* integrate the visual continuity of (certain) silent cinema with the "added realism" of sound—film history since his death has decidedly reversed this pattern: montage and collage forms of many kinds have appeared or reappeared and many kinds of expressionism also. Nor is Bazin's scheme unexceptionable in relation to his own period. The truth is that every technological and aesthetic development in film history has increased the expressive resources of realism in Bazin's sense, but those of every other form and style of cinema also. Finally, as mentioned above, Bazin makes film history into a progress toward realism (in "Evolution" especially) largely by including everything *but* montage and expressionism within that term. Instead of film history made realistic, "realism" is historicized.

The ontology/history conflict in Bazin's thought remains. In a subsequent essay we will return to this conflict from the perspective of the history of film thought.